DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 032 207 RE 001 953

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Pub Date May 69

Note-12p.; Paper presented at the International Reading Association conference, Kansas City, Mo., Apr. 30-May 3, 1969.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70

Descriptors-Communication Problems, *Community Relations, Mass Media, Methods, *Parent School Relationship, Reading Instruction, *Reading Programs, Teacher Role

The problems involved in explaining the school reading program to the community are discussed, and methods for effective communication are outlined. Mobility of the community population, disparity within programs and among educators, and confusion of educational terminology are seen as factors inhibiting communication. Methods of effective communication include staff talks to small groups, brochures describing the reading program, and indexes to special services. The importance of the teacher's role in communication and interpretation is emphasized, and steps in planning a demonstration lesson are outlined. Information necessary for parental understanding of reading instruction is discussed, and suggestions about reading for parents with school-age children are listed. Methods of reporting students' reading progress are outlined. Additional methods of communicating the goals and activities of the reading program include use of mass media and public relations techniques. (RT)

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INTERPRETATION OF THE READING PROGRAM TO THE COMMUNITY

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The division falls into three separate categories: difficulties in communication, basic concepts of communication and methods of interpretation. One of the prominent difficulties in the interpretation of any program is in the mobility of population and dilution of interest. A short time ago, 5% of the United States families moved from the county in which they were living; 18% of them moved from one house to another within that county; and within 5 years, close to 30% of all families moved to a new community. This high rate of mobility continues with little reason to expect a decrease. If anything, it will increase.

We are well aware that it takes time to build understanding in any community. There is a desperate need for a stable element in the school community to help build this understanding. In the meantime, the propaganda skills of other groups -- magazines, newspapers (adverse editorials), radios, books (where even educators don't agree) -- continue to work against the common element of understanding.

School Organizations

School organizations, both administrative and supervisory, as well as differences between schools in the same systems and the kinds of programs in existence tend to work counter to effective communication. It is often difficult to understand reading terminology: individualized reading, team teaching, ungraded primary school, continuous progress, etc. There is disagreement among educators themselves on the approaches to the teaching of reading, the major one being phonics versus the integrated reading program. Many times there are vast differences within the same system.

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Decentralization of schools in larger systems tends to create a stir. However, the philosophy and objectives should be the same. Rumors, gossip, word of mouth communication frequently lack consistency. Pressure groups should never be underestimated since they are usually adverse. The function of the pressure group is usually putting someone out of a job rather than putting someone in. However, if you can select a vocal member of the pressure group and build understanding with this person, having him serve with you will help to develop an ally rather than an adversary. Often this person may just want to be heard. It would be an advantage if this person had a good student in school, although parents of good students are not always the ones vocalizing.

Adult Understanding Levels

The population reading ability has been raised which correlates with the number of years in school. William S. Gray estimated that the average U.S. citizen read at the 9th grade level. About 15% of these were classified as functionally illiterate (unable to read at the 5th grade level), but they were not functionally speechless! Of this we are all aware. In spite of this reading ability, it is in the interpretation where the difficulty occurs. It's not what they can read but what they will read and frequently misinterpret. We must remember that controversial material has always had a greater interest value than realistic, positively stated material.

Only a limited number of local school staffs are in a position to write for magazines owing to the nature of the magazine; however, some educational associations do have both direct and indirect access to magazine pages. The N.E.A. is sometimes effective in placing articles (in both large and small circulation magazines) which does create understanding and good will.

The Conant Survey at the Junior High School Level cited certain schools in which 35-50% were reading at the 6th grade level or below. It is one thing to say 1/3 of the pupils are falling below grade level in reading and another to say they are impervious to book learning. Too often mental retardation is confused with reading retardation. We are more aware of the retardation in reading today than we were in former years. The students who used to drop out more frequently now remain in school. Poor instruction is only one cause of retardation. The lack of interest and unfavorable attitude are characteristic of most poor readers. Motivation is frequently the number 1 problem in many instances.

You may recall in the Journal of Reading, April 1968, "Do It Yourself Terminology Generator" by Edward Fry (U.Q.R.D.S., Unqualified Reading Disability Specialist), Mr. Fry composed three columns of terms. No. 1, the Qualifier, contained such terms as primary, diffuse, organic, specific, etc; No. 2, classified as the Area of Involvement, contained such terms as cerebral, perceptual, impulse, etc.; Column 3, classified as Problem, contained such terms as dysfunction, syndrome, pathology, etc. The directions were to select any word from column 1, add any word from column 2, and then add any word from column 3. If you don't like the results, try again. It will mean about the same thing, with such consolidated terms as primary cerebral dysfunction, diffuse perceptual pathology, or organic impulse syndrome. This system, 30 terms, 10 in each column, would yield 1000 terms which could be supplemented with neurophrenia, specific dyslexia, organicity, or developmental lag. This typifies what parents often hear when they have the children screened at a diagnostic reading clinic. As another example, a report received from a nearby clinic stated "no strephosymbolia apparent". One wonders why it was mentioned at all unless they were more interested in the effect of hyperboles.

Concerning the concepts of interpretation, the teacher is still the key person in communication and interpretation. It is essential for her to build rapport and understanding with parents about the reading program. If the teacher's work in the reading program is misunderstood by children and parents, no explanation by administration or mass media can re-establish good understanding. The one to one relationship, teacher with parent, is most effective. Here the prized possession (child) can be discussed privately. Sometimes we hear comments from the teacher such as "I am not a public relations agent", "Let the principal do it", and "Education is too complicated for untrained people to understand". Teachers are qualified to discover children's level of understanding; the same can be done with parents but it takes time to build understanding.

It is essential for any professional staff member to have administrative support. High quality teaching is more creditable than poor teaching, yet both are defended. Providing effective instruction is the first step, the rudimentary basis, for interpreting any program. Carry in mind the child in school will soon be the adult in society. A favorable or unfavorable image will accompany him. Building understanding with children is important. They need to succeed within their capability level. This success will automatically be conveyed to parents through children.

Interpretation denotes communication with its Latin derivative (communis) meaning to share. We must always share education with parents and the public. Involve them. Involve parents in study groups. Put the vocal groups together to air views. People tend to like what they work for. Exchange ideas of reading. Leadership from the Reading Department on controversial issues and articles would have the effect of catharsis -- a good sounding session will get much of

the venom out of the system. We must take the initiative to constantly inform in small groups -- mother study groups, PTA's by sections (primary, intermediate, junior high school and senior high school). This may also be done by other departments at the secondary level in an afternoon session. Provide parents with something concrete to help children. Make suggestions for home help and what they can do. Reading to children of all ages is a necessity. Provide brochures to new parents. Indexes to different special services is a good way to inform parents of what is available. Bring in supplementary sources for interpretive purposes: speech therapists, psychologists, librarians, etc., since the total reading process involves many. Invite Reading Department members to appear before the Board of Education to discuss the program in reading and what is done. Board members are usually professional and businessmen who want to be informed and are in a key position to talk to merchants, townspeople, etc. This is one way to gain administrative support of the reading program which is of paramount importance. Hold meetings with regional IRA (by-laws suggest involving parents). Periodically bring in specialists to discuss various aspects of reading or factors influencing reading: mental health counselors to discuss emotional factors involved in reading and how parents affect children's learning climate; speech therapists to develop language facility, and the informal activities parents can become involved in. Optometrists could discuss the function of the eyes and what is meant by mature vision (perhaps not on the same program with physicians). Discuss physical health necessary for learning; an audiologist might discuss the importance of proper auditory perception. Initiate a survey and questionnaire to find out what parents want to know about the reading program. Compile information and prepare a pamphlet for them.

The parent-teacher conference is usually the more personal way to interpret the reading program. Personal respect is fostered, questions may be asked, and misunderstandings corrected, K-12. Report when reading progress is good. Include fathers who are often able to ask some very provocative questions. Arrange days for visitation. Speak in terms of possibilities for additional achievement and how the home can also become a part of the total reading program. Have parents witness a typical reading lesson by being pupils themselves on PTA night. Introduce a lesson. Establish policy and standard procedures in the system to use with any kind of reading program. Stress consistency wherever possible for the purpose of clearer interpretation. Present a series of recorded sections of reading, lessons dealing with phonics 1-6. Make colored slides to bring to parent groups to show various reading activities at all levels through the high school, actual pictures from classrooms in the system.

Planning the Demonstration Lesson

1. Carefully plan details of the meeting with parents before extending the invitation. A tea session can set a relaxed atmosphere. If they don't stay beyond the tea session, they will still want to find out what happened with neighbors afterward.
2. Discuss with parents the specific objectives of the demonstration so that they will know what to look for. These may be written on the board.
3. Present a short demonstration with children using basal reading and older children using another text. Include work on vocabulary, comprehension, and word attack.

4. Discuss the demonstration. Encourage questions and allow the readers to be inspected.
5. Suggest to parents that they visit higher grade levels to observe more advanced work in auditory-visual combination skill building, types of comprehension, critical reading, etc.

Larrick, in her survey on what parents want to know about children's reading, found that 35% surveyed wanted to know how they could help children learn to enjoy reading more; 25% of the parents wanted to know what books and magazines to recommend to children; 21% wanted to know how they could help their children learn to read better; and 19% wished to know how reading is taught in school today. Some of the questions most frequently asked were: "Why don't children learn their ABC's before they start to read?", "Why is one child slower than another in learning to read?", "Why do schools promote children from one grade to another when they are behind in reading?", and "Do they still teach reading by sounds of letters?". Any of these would be excellent topics for discussion in school and community groups. Parents are divided in the ways to teach reading, the new, multi-sensory, or the old sounding letters, phonics method. We need to start developing understanding of how to bring the two together in a balanced program while creating a definition of what reading actually is.

What do we want parents to understand about the teaching of reading?

1. The primary concern to get across is <u>reading is understanding</u>. Every activity and experience during pre-school years can contribute to interest and skill in reading.
2. The child must want to read. No one can make him unless he is ready and willing. Locate material which will extend an initial interest in a movie, a television show, etc.

3. Children grow and develop at different rates. They therefore begin to read at different times. Pressure cannot make them walk, talk or read sooner. Enjoyment and willingness are often destroyed through pressure.
4. Reading is continuous and goes on all the time in one way or another: street and traffic signs, TV commercials, etc. Encourage reading aloud at home. Take books home. Replicas of primers at the earlier levels may be taken home. Duplicated pages from a reader with the child making his own cover is a good interest factor.

No subject area has a better outline of objectives and manuals on how to teach with supplementary sources, activity sheets than reading. The one most important concept to get across to parents is an understanding of their child and what to expect from him in terms of achievement very early in formal training once his learning rate is established. The reading expectancy level is closely related to the ability to learn in general. When this is understood and accepted, success in learning will be realized. Every child has a level of success.

Strang, in her early advice to parents, has given some very good don't's as follows:

1. Don't become irritated and disgusted with the child if he isn't doing satisfactory work in reading. Find out why first.
2. Don't tell him to be ashamed of himself if he is having difficulty.
3. Don't tell him he must learn to read in school. Many first graders will not read the first or even the second year.
4. Don't talk about him before other family members or visitors.

5. Don't compare him with others.

6. Don't over-indulge him in other ways because you feel sorry for him.

Interpreting the reading program may be done in reporting reading progress.

1. Has the progress report been developed cooperatively, involving teachers, administrators and pupils?

2. Does the report recognize individual differences in ability, the learning rate, and at what reading level each student succeeds in reading? If he is in grade 6 and reading at grade 4 level, this should be indicated. The same holds true if he is in grade 10 and reading at 6th grade level. Everyone has a successful level of performance.

3. Achievement in terms of percentiles was just beginning to be understood before we shifted to stanines. This may have caused some interpretation difficulty.

4. Favorable comments on progress are always welcome.

5. The language of reporting reading progress must be adjusted to the parents. Neighborhood schools should develop their own progress report. This is most difficult in communities where there is a wide range of educational background. The illiterate to the professional level is found in some community schools.

6. Supplementary letters and conferences are good reinforcements. All will welcome uncomplicated reports. The suggestion would be to do a trial run in one school in a community and see what the response is.

Establishing a new program at the secondary level will necessitate a gradual approach using survey tests to help determine the range of reading skill, perhaps in grades 9 and 10. A reading specialist with experience at

the elementary level with some knowledge of primary reading may offer to help teach a class in the other disciplines: mathematics, social studies, sciences, etc. Presenting a lesson using the vocabulary of the other areas will demonstrate what reading is involved.

The continuous program in reading is an effective way to show the importance of reading and the necessity to continue building skills.

Teachers are usually verbal people and can communicate directly with parents in conferences and panel discussions. Subject area staff at the secondary level can readily communicate their own specialized fields if they have the understanding of reading requirements involved therein with some idea of their student's capabilities to read. Subject area achievement requirements are frequently stressed above basic reading requirements for the area. It is important for secondary staff members to be aware of reading levels of the individual students within their class.

Administrative staff organization is important, for any repercussion will eventually get back to the administration including the superintendent. Because of this, it might be better to have the administrative staff organization serve as the clearing house for all information going out to the public. No one person can possibly transmit all information. Clarify within the staff from the superintendent on down before presenting to the public through some of the more common channels:

1. news releases
2. civic group meetings -- Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis
3. parent discussion leader speakers
4. speakers drawn from the professional staff bureau

A Director of Public Relations and Research is a good source for interpretation if the system can afford this. Periodic bulletins to the public on various programs and actual pictures and narratives are good means of communication. If this person is not available, appointment of a person from the community really interested and trained in communication who appreciates the importance and function of public relations and is competent to work with various organizations in the school and community might be made. A mother whose family is raised and who still maintains an interest in the school could join the staff.

In the use of mass media in interpreting the reading program, radio interviews of various school personnel involved in the reading program could be planned. These would include teachers, principals, possibly visiting authorities. In planning a radio and TV program, invite an authority in the field to participate in the community for several days to get the flavor of the city. Hold workshops for administrators, supervisors, visiting teachers and speak on reading.

Two-thirds of all sets are in use during the evening hours. Therefore programs should be of interest to fathers. The mid-morning programs will catch the mothers who could call in questions. Theories, methods of teaching reading, actual practices could be discussed. Panels might include a layman, a TV personality, an authority in the field, a staff member, with a TV personality doing the interviewing (varied viewpoints on reading). The layman and the video personality can bring the language of communication to a more understandable plane. This could be followed up with questions on the radio the following day.

Panel discussions composed of administrators, supervisors, and teachers are more appealing if directly related to their school and their system. In the use of mass media, information should come from within the staff first before reaching outside mass media. This will reduce chances of propaganda. The school will serve as the point of origin feeding information to the organized groups, individual adults and mass media. The subsequent communication would then be from the mass media back to organized groups, individual adults, etc., rather than have information originate with either mass media or organized groups.

School newspapers, written in the students' own words telling what was done in reading, usually can make a favorable impression on parents. Newspapers in general are a powerful means of communication. The schools need to make them an ally no matter what is to be conveyed. Establish a publicity policy and encourage special coverage of school events. Editors covering educational programs are usually more objective reporters. Learn the jargon of education. Review and edit reports with both newspaper and school personnel jointly to produce varied information. Each building could have a news coordinator to feed into the Office of Publications and Research.

No matter what is used as a means of communication, the reading program is only as successful as it can be effectively interpreted to the public.